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SUBJECT: UNESCO: 174th EXECUTIVE BOARD HIGHLIGHTS CHALLENGES FOR SCIENCES REVIEW PANEL

Ref: 05 Paris 3024

1. Summary: The 174th Executive Board highlighted two major challenges that UNESCO faces in the Natural Sciences Sector. Firstly, the Secretariat needs to define a strategy for UNESCO's category two centers. Secondly, the Secretariat must respond to the demand from member states for cross-sector activities that help developing countries build capacity, particularly in the field of water resources; the secretariat has not made progress on a program proposed by the U.S. in this area (Reftel). These are issues that could be addressed by the panel set up to conduct the "overall review" of Programs II and III (the Natural Sciences Sector and the Social and Human Sciences Sector) mandated by the September 2005 General Conference. Although the review of the Sciences sector was not on the agenda of this Executive Board, Norway signaled its intent to request a progress report at the Fall 2006 Executive Board. End Summary.

Category II Centers - In Search of a Strategy

2. As has been the case at its past several sessions, the 174th Executive Board considered items related to the establishment of category II centers. (Note: Category II centers are those defined as "operating under the auspices of UNESCO"; category I centers are "an integral part of the organization". There are currently 14 category II centers with a scientific focus. End Note.) On the agenda for this Executive Board was a feasibility study for an urban water center in Cali, Colombia (item 10). Also on the agenda (Item 11) was "a memorandum of understanding between UNESCO and the intergovernmental organization Itaipu Binational" (Brazil, Paraguay) on water resources technical cooperation. (Note: Itaipu manages a large dam. The Brazilian Ambassador intervened at a Bureau meeting that addressed this topic to say it is not in fact an intergovernmental organization, but rather a company with shares owned by Brazil and Paraguay. End Note.) According to the documentation provided, Itaipu may evolve into a category II center.

As has become typical, the two agenda items were adopted with minimal debate, as the Secretariat assured member states that establishing the centers would entail no financial obligations for UNESCO; the Itaipu item was listed among items not requiring debate.

3. During the brief debate on the Bogota Center, Japan noted that the Fall 2005 General Conference had approved category II water centers in La Serena Chile (Cazalac, specializing in arid and semi-arid zones) and Panama City (Cathalac, humid tropics): "Does this then fill our quota for Latin American water centers?" He stressed the need for a more strategic approach to creating centers.

4. In fact, a document prepared for the 2005 meeting of the Bureau of the International Hydrological Program (IHP) notes that "the situation has reached the point where some thought needs to be given as to how to make the best use of the centers and to changing their relationships with the main pillars of UNESCO's actions in water: the IHP, the UNESCO Institute for Water Education in Delft (IHE) and the UNESCO-based World Water Assessment Program." New guidelines for establishing category II centers were adopted by the Fall 2005 General Conference, but these were administrative, rather than strategic, in scope. The General Conference also asked the Secretariat to report to the Spring 2006 Executive Board "on the

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creation of category 2 institutes and centers and their contribution to strategic program objectives," but this is likely to be a catalogue of existing centers, rather than a strategic plan.

Member States Thirst for Technical Capacity Building

5. The most important science issue on this Executive Board agenda for the U.S. was "The Development of a Cross-Sector Capacity Building Program" (item 14). At the Spring 2005 Executive Board, the U.S. successfully tabled a draft decision with 20 co-sponsors asking the Secretariat to "develop a cross-sector program on technical capacity building, and to submit a progress report at its 174th session" (Reftel). The report submitted by the Secretariat to this Executive Board in fact merely catalogued the full range of

current UNESCO activities that could contribute in some way to capacity building, defined in its most broad terms.

16. The U.S. intervened first, taking the opportunity to remind the Board that the decision had in fact called for the creation of a program focusing on water resources, basic science and math education, engineering, and technology. Fifteen other states intervened, all favorable to the concept underlying the program; France echoed U.S. disappointment in the lack of vision/strategy. Norway successfully proposed language requesting that the cross-sector program be developed within the context of the new C4/5 Program and Budget (2008-9) and Medium-Term Strategy (2008-13). The U.S. was successful in amending the draft decision to require the DG to report back to the 176th (Spring 2006), vice 177th, Executive Board. The U.S. attempt to insert language saying that the Capacity Building Program should be informed by the ongoing review of the Natural Sciences and Social and Human Sciences Sectors was countered by Brazil, who pointed out that the review panel is not meant to make recommendations before the Fall 2007 General Conference. A U.S. request for clarification on this point was met by silence on the part of the Secretariat. (Note: We have been assured by the Director General and by Deputy Director General Barbosa that the work of the science review panel will feed into the Medium-Term Strategy. End Note.)

17. Member states accorded a similarly favorable response to an education program for the sustainable management of freshwater resources (item 48); in fact, Morocco and other Arab and African states simply re-tabled an item that had been approved by the spring 2003 Executive Board. This program had some elements in common with the U.S.-sponsored capacity building program adopted in 2005 -- focus on water resources, cross-sector work, and education. Another element in common: the secretariat has made no progress to date on implementing that program, either. Agenda item 49, asking member states to accord emergency assistance to drought-stricken Djibouti, served as an inadvertent counterpoint, highlighting the need for UNESCO to invest in long-term sustainable efforts, rather than to simply bewail crises after the fact.
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